

CITY OF NEWARK, NJ'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Mayor Sharpe James -- December 3, 1996

Q: This is Glen Marie Brickus is the office of Mayor Sharpe James at City Hall in Newark. And today is December 3 and it's now approximately a quarter to eleven o'clock. Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor, for giving us an opportunity to come and to talk with you and to make you a part of the Scott-Krueger Cultural Center effort.

James: My pleasure And always welcome. And, of course, when you say Scott-Krueger you bring some magic names into play that brings about excitement and, of course, the rich cultural history of the City of Newark. So I welcome you in that spirit.

Q: Thank you. Let me begin with some personal information. Your name please, your age, your place of birth and your occupation.

James: Sharpe - S H A R P E - and the E is silent so it is pronounced as Sharp. And then, of course, my last name is James. And that's unique because it means that my mother's maiden name was Sharpe and my father's name was James. So two families came together, and I represent that in my name. Sharpe on my mother's side; James on my father's side. Born in Jacksonville, Florida, February the twentieth, 1936. And, of course, presently age 60, going on 39.

Q: Where were you born again? I didn't get that.

James: Jacksonville, Florida. But at a very early age, when my mother was being harrassed by my stepfather. Came home from the war with his bayonet, with all these weapons, his German Lueger, and he used to chase her around and beat her. And finally threw from a train trestle, almost cost the loss of her life, but miraculously she lived. She lost movement in both her arms, almost like seventy or eighty stitches. She had been a great pianist up to that point. And so there after her recovery, one morning she woke us up very early in the morning, took no belongings,

went down to the train track, lit a fire to stop the train. I always remember how you stop trains in the south at the location, built a fire by the railroad. The train stopped. We got on it, and by way of trains and buses and cars and walking, we ended up in Elizabeth, New Jersey, living with my then uncle, the late Uncle Jessie James. That is the famous name. Living with my uncle Jessie James in Elizabeth, New Jersey, who used to ride that big old motorcycle around Elizabeth, New Jersey. And then, of course, from Elizabeth, New Jersey, somehow we found Newark at a very early age, when I was about maybe nine years old. And Newark is the only city I know. It's the only city I love. Jacksonville, Florida, my birthplace, but Newark, New Jersey, the only city I know.

Q: Your occupation now, and did you have primary occupations before you were doing before you were doing what you do now?

James: Well, after coming to Newark and graduating from Miller Street School, and then, of course, Southside High School, now Malcom X Shabazz, I attended Montclair State College. Graduated from there. I recieved a Master's Degree from Springfield College. Thereafter, I was a doctoral candidate at Washington State University under the late Dean Romney. I've attended Columbia University and then back to Rutgers University. I am an educator by profession, my trade. I have been a teacher in the Newark School system, having taught at Quitman Street School, elementary education, where I met my wife Mary. Having taught at Essex County College for nineteen years in the department of behavioral sciences, having been a director of athletics, the first black director of athletics in the state colleges and universities in New Jersey, having been president of the Garden State Athletic Conference presiding over the states of New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, there's one other one, Pennsylvania, I guess. And so by trade an educator who in 1970 was asked to participate in the black and Puerto Rican convention, and out of that convention they had invited me in just as an educator. I remember Ruth McLane said, Sharpe just come and keep the seats warm. We want some teachers and educators. You are a highly successful coach, you're a community activist, you've been president of the Wickwake Community Council, president of Area Board 9. Just come and keep the seats warm.

And then, of course, they had planned that George Richardson would be the mayoralty candidate. That Horace B. Sharp would be the candidate of the South Ward. When George Richardson accused the convention of rigging it for Ken Gibson, he bolted out of the black and Puerto Rican convention in 1970, 69-70. And then, of course, when George Richardson bolted out saying it was rigged for Ken Gibson, Horace B Sharp bolted out as the candidate from the South Ward. So they had no candidate from the South Ward. Said what are we gonna do? Fifteen hundred people screaming in there they want the candidate from the South Ward. Who's gonna run on the community's choice team with Ken Gibson. [Laughter]

Q: You laughed when you said that.

James: Well go get that big mouth teacher. Go get that coach. Who? Sharpe James. And there I was seated there with my black and white Buster Brown shoes on, my green plaid span pants, and my pink corduroy shirt, which picture remains today in South Ward City Hall at 1070 Bergen Street. And they said, go out there and tell them that you're the candidate from the South Ward. I said, what is the South Ward? Where is the South Ward? And go out there and tell them that you're the candidate. And I went out on the stage and they started cheering and screaming and hooting and hollering. And I went backstage said, they love me. They said, no. They never seen anyone with a pink checkered shirt on, a green checkered pants on, and black and white Tom Buster McCann shoes, and in need of a haircut. Well, that was my humble beginnings in politics.

Q: What degrees did you earn, Mr. James?

James: I have a Bachelor of Science degree in education, a Master of Science degree in education, thirty-two in physiology from the Washington State University, and then another 6 degrees in education from Rutgers and Columbia University where I was a doctoral student under Dr. Hoye at Rutgers University. And then, of course, I began to make a choice and as I moved from education to politics, I completely emerged myself in the political world. And now I'm a frustrated, non-completed doctoral candidate at Rutgers and Columbia University.

Q: Who did you marry, Mr. James, when and where?

James: Well, I was teaching at Quitman Street School when it was first opened up. The principal was Mrs. Marie A. Yaramenasen. There was Sharpe James there. And I walked down the halls one day and saw a skinny teacher standing on the stool, and I put on my brakes and said, whooo, who's that? They said what was Mary Madison. I said Mary Madison. At that time I was going with Miss Helen Barnes another schoolteacher. We had a wild affair. We used to walk on top of the bar, under the bar, over the bar. Miss Helen Barnes of Vauxhall, New Jersey, who is still living there on Sophia Street. And so, then I saw Miss Madison, who's a complete opposite of my present girlfriend who wanted me to drive a hundred miles an hour in the car, walk on top of the bar and under the bar. And Miss Mary Madison. Well, I met Miss Mary Madison, and shortly thereafter we were married in St. James AME Church, I believe in 1963 or 64. It seems like only yesterday so I can't remember the exact time. And I remember Reverend Blake was there. Because the wedding cost us fifteen dollars to use the church, and everyone was invited to bring their own brown bag. So we were married in the church upstairs. Everybody walked right down the back stairs of St. James AME Church, and then on Irving Turner Blvd. and Court Street, and went downstairs for a reception of about a hundred friends who brought their own food. And then Reverend Blake put us in a room and said, Sharpe, Mary I want to tell you one thing now. First, give me your fifteen dollars. Now, I'm telling you two never to get angry at the same time. Sharpe when Mary's angry, you be calm. And Mary, when Sharpe's angry, you be calm. But I never want you two to be angry at the same time. Cause that's when frying pans and the pots fly and someone get hurt.

Now almost thirty-two or thirty-three years later, we've never been angry at the same time. We've never had a fight. Never had an argument. And we have three lovely boys as testimony of this marriage. And I owe it all to St. James AME Church, Reverend Blake and fifteen dollars. And by the way, we were married on Friday, and we were back in school on Monday at Quitman Street School.

Q: Well, that's outstanding.



James: By the way, it just reminds me why people today get married, spend fifty thousand dollars, hundred thousand dollars, and they get divorced three weeks from now. They ought to try it our way. Fifteen dollars and stay together for thirty-two or thirty-four years.

Q: Well, you, it would be extremely difficult to get married anywhere now for fifteen dollars. How long did you and Mary know each other before you were married?

James: I think it was only about three months. We might have dated for three months. No six, because we were there for school year, and then they raised the question could husband and wife be in the same school. And I think we finished the school year, and then after that I went to Westside High School. She remained at Quitman Street. But they had raised the question could husband and wife be in the same faculty in the same school.

Q: You said awhile ago that you have three children.

James: Three boys, and each were born in a campaign. Seems that that the campaign motivated birth of a child. If you sort of thought I was elected in 1970, didn't have any children at that time. But by 74 one was born, 78 one was born, and I think 82 one was born. So we have three boys now. And God's blessing. They have been able to attend public and private school. They have the best of two worlds. John, James and they started out interestingly enough going to that Montessori School that Eugene Campbell, assistance teacher on South Seventeenth Street. So John attended Montessori School. Then they both went to Vail Dean private school. And then something strange happened. I thought the private schools were just using them as an ethnic thing. They had to have African-American children. They needed them. And my kids were bringing home Cs and Bs, and I didn't think they were Cs and B student. Interestingly enough, I just felt that they were, long as not boys, were well-mannered, and they were well-mannered. They would always get passing grades. They were black kids that were well-mannered, were quiet, were disciplined. So the white society said they're B students. But they weren't being challenged. They needed them to qualify for Federal funding, and they were well-mannered. So they were just nice

kids. I brought John back to St. Benedict's. He started flunking and had to turn around. I brought Elliott when he was in school back to University. He started flunking and had to turn around. And ended up being the class president. So it proved to me that contrary to what people believe it was the public schools, public education, that challenged my two sons. Well, that's one that parochial. Because he had went to Chancellor before that. And Howard Caesar was their teacher. But it was public schools that challenged my kids. That made them, you're gonna learn, you're gonna do something, you ain't gonna just sit there and be nice. And so I'm always a strong defender of public schools. And now my youngest son, who is the biggest, the tallest, the meanest, is at Wickwake High School, and I try to put him in private school. He said, he won't wear shoes 360 days. He won't wear that shirt and tie every day. And the one thing I have to say, I've never forced them to try to be an athlete like their father did, an educator like their father, be anything like their father. So when my third son rebelled against private and parochial school, he is in Wickwake High School, and we're trying to impress upon him that it is important to graduate.

Q: How old is he now Sharpe?

James: He's seventeen.

Q: And what's his name?

James: That's Kevin.

Q: Kevin. So your sons are James.

James: John James, John Sharpe James, John Madison Sharpe James. John his first name. Madison, Mary's family name. Sharpe, my family's name. James. So he is John Madison Sharpe James. Then the next son is Elliott. He is Elliott Madison James. I don't think he had the Sharpe there. And then we have Kevin Sharpe James.

Q: You spoke briefly about a primary relationship before you met Mary. And that broke off after you met Mary.

James: Oh, you mean Miss Helen Barnes.

Q: Yeah.

James: Oh, you mean my wild girlfriend. She's still an educator in Newark School system. Now and then I bump into her at the bowling league. So happy to say hello. But once I got married, then, you know, just cleaning, cooking and doing all those domesticated things that I had to learn how to do.

Q: You mentioned your father. Give me his name again and his place of birth.

James: Joseph Louis James. So my brother is Joe Louis James.

Q: Did you have any, just you and your brother Joe? Or were there others?

James: Just two boys who are totally different. Sharpe James and Joseph Louis James. My brother, Joe Louis James, who is a year older. We both attended the school, raised in the same household, and you could never find two people more different in your life. Joe is an engineer, a recluse. I met a guy last night, went to an affair for Charlie Wright, at the Newark Black Recital. Kid walked up to me and this is almost thirty some years later, is Joe still building rockets and submarines. I said, no, now he's building PVs and bomb sites to drop on people. My brother was an engineer born. What is unknown to people is that my uncle Japan James, who lived in Elizabeth. Jessie James lived in Elizaabeth. Japan James, was, and this is almost unbelievable, was an engineer, created, built engines, jets and all that. A black man walking the streets of Elizabeth who was an engineer. And then when his wife had left him, he just became homeless. He was a homeless engineer, who walked the street of Newark many years. And people didn't

know who he was. He used to ride a bicycle with a motor on it. Smoke a pipe that was twisted. And he was a very odd sight on the streets of Newark. Japan James, my uncle. We eventually gave him an ultimatum and put him in the Jay Medical and just recently died. He was an engineer and a failed marriage. An engineer on the streets of Newark, homeless. But he was always an engineer. My brother takes after him, my uncle. He was born an engineer. He knew slide rules, he knew math, he knew trigonometry. In high school he was considered advanced in South Side in the fields of math. Didn't want English, didn't want history, but he graduated. Wouldn't take English, wouldn't take history, scored A in all the engineering courses, wouldn't let him graduate. Had to go back, and they forced him in another year showing him the wisdom of it cause he came out engineering work, but he didn't have his degree, to go back and get a D in English and get a D in history because it required degree. But he at an early age could build bombs, could build submarines. He contributed to the bomb sights that they drop out of planes. And he is an engineer who they hire to do special projects. They have an idea to build something, he comes in, builds it for them and leaves. And he lives in Plainfield, New Jersey.

Q: Your brother lives in Plainfield now?

James: Yes. And he hates people. He wants to make people. He wants to clone a man. He's now working on to make a man, to make a robot man that will answer questions. And they have it, they have this in society already, but he wants to perfect it where he would be able, any question you put to him, he can program. Ask him how are you, fine. What day you born. So that's his special project now. He wants to clone man.

Q: And he has the resources now to be working on that?

James: He's doing it.

Q: Oh, that's interesting. Very interesting. I'm going to skip some of these questions because.



James: By the way his daughter's an engineer. He has two girls.

Q: Where did they go to school?

James: One is an engineer. Right where he went. Graduated I think too. And one daughter is an editor. So he got one, finally got out of that mode. But one is a clone of him. Both engineers, both crazy.

Q: You talked about having left Florida and come to Newark at a very young age. What do you remember about, was it Jacksonville?

James: Jacksonville, Florida.

Q: What do you remember about Jacksonville?

James: Canned police sirens all through the night chasing black people off the street. And whenever you'd hear a siren or see the police you would run and hide. Fear. I felt the weight of segregation and being a second class citizen and being fearful of the police. They could beat you and shoot you and kill you and you'd never knew it. Whenever I, all through the night you would hear sirens through our neighborhood, and the police you were taught to fear, to run and hide. So as a kid, whenever we'd see a police car, we'd run and hide cause we knew they would stop you. They could beat you. They could harrass you. They could lock you up. Or you'd disappear. So the south that I know was one of loving relatives, close friends, sitting on the big porch on Pearl Street, and so forth like that. The big old houses like my grandparents and all like that. But being completely fearful of the police, and considering the police like an invading army.

Q: And how old were you then at that time, when you left?

James: Well, I came here in 44, 36. I was nine when I arrived in Elizabeth. Nine years of age.

So up to nine, fearful of the police. And the rich extended family of the south, where relatives lived in these big old houses, and aunts and uncles, and on the back porch, and eating in the backyard and. It's like one, big extended family. You didn't know the difference between your mama, your grandmama. Everybody was just the James so, or the Madisons, well, not Madisons. The James family like that there. And living so closely knit, extended family, fear of the police. White people are to be feared.

Q: So there was just you and your mother and your brother who left Jacksonville and came to New Jersey.

James: That's correct. The three of us. By hook or crook. Trains, buses, walking, cab. We knew we had an uncle. She knew she had a brother-in-law cause she had married Joseph Louis James. He had a brother Jesse James and had a brother Japan James living in Elizabeth, New Jersey. She was determined to get there to escape the brutality of my stepfather. Cause my father had died when I was born. So I never lived to know my father.

Q: And you had relatives in Elizabeth when you came there. How long did you stay in Elizabeth and when did you come to Newark?

James: I think we stayed on Third Street and Pine, Third and Pine, about a year. And I attended George Washington School there for a year, I think. I have to look at my records there for the year. Played in the Pirene Field there. And I think mother worked in Singer Sewing Company right down the street. The Pirene Match Company right there next to the Pirene Athletic Field across the street from the George Washington School. That's on Third and Pine. I think we shared one room or two rooms, three rooms with my uncle for maybe six months. And then mother, who always created, and worked in the restaurant in Elizabeth and saved enough money for a down payment for the house on Emma Street, 4300 Street, on the left. The house, it always amazed me, cost her forty-two hundred dollars. And forty-two hundred dollars back then in 1946 was like fourhundred thousand today. And she put something down and then she was the head

book at Woodey's Seafood Market on Sherman Avenue. Mother was always in restaurants. Then she owned a restaurant But she was the head cook at Woodey's Seafood Market, Sherman Avenue, between Noah and Wright Street. And then eventually she could own her own restaurant. But we bought the house at 43 Emma Street from that famous man, Phillip Mandelbaum for forty-two hundred dollars. My mother used to keep a card, like the forty-two hundred and you paid ten dollars, you paid fifteen dollars. Even sold clothes that way. The guy would come to the house and we'd buy credit. They'd have a card. We used to go to the store, and I would have. Mother would send me to the store on Wright Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. Mama want half pound balogne, loaf of bread. And he'd just write it on a card. We always do credit. [Laughter] Everything there was credit.

Q: What prompted your mother to move from Elizabeth to Newark?

James: Four of us in two rooms just didn't work out. I always knew. I think the trunk was the biggest thing in that apartment. I remember we didn't have room. We were really inconveniencing our Uncle Jesse James. And he was flamboyant, nice and everything else, and we were in the way. And so I think he tolerated us from three to six months, whatever it was, until mother could get the down payment and purchase the house at 43 Emmett Street from Mandelbaum.

Q: Do you remember any specifics about your trip from Florida into New Jersey? You said a while ago that you came by bus, train.

James: Train first.

Q: Whatever. So do you remember any specifics about any of those?

James: Just being huddled by your mother. No. It's a blank struggle in my life how my mother got us from the south. Just train, bus, car, hike, walk and we were in Elizabeth, New Jersey. And that is like climbing the rough side of a mountain that my mother did.

Q: Were you ever confronted with or experienced segregated facilities in the south or even after you had gotten to?

James: On, in the south always. In the south there was always segregation. It was that, you could, they didn't care how close you got because you could have integrated neighborhoods, but you couldn't get big. You know, in the north it was, they didn't care how big you get, but you couldn't get close. Like in the south you'll find blacks and whites living on the same street, same area, but they were still, you were a boy and they were Mr. and Mrs., you know. And hey boy. You know. Nice boy.

Q: You were fifty years old, you were still a boy.

James: So, you know, that always interest me. South, blacks and whites, were, neighborhoods were integrated, but you were a boy still.

Q: Do you remember what personal effects your mother brought with you when you came?

James: Whatever was on our backs. We had nothing. We came. Mother couldn't travel with anything. And when she left, we left all our belongings. Everything we had. And we were poor. I think one thing, thread through our entire life is that we were always poor. But we always saw education and hard work as the light at the end of the tunnel. So we always got along. And I think a strong religious life. God fearing, Christian family. And God is on our side. And if you stay in school, get an education, and work hard you'll make it despite what you see out there. The hostility in the south and the police, everything else. And come to Elizabeth and Newark and having nothing. The one thing that I always pride and I don't, I can't believe when I say it over and over again. I was never absent in school. I won the attendance in Miller Street School and Southside. I don't recall being absent other than a wake or something. Push us up to the school. It was just mandatory that you go to school. So I won the attendance award and brushing my teeth.

Q: How often have you returned or visited Jacksonville since you left?

James: When I was elected mayor in 1986 was the first time I'd ever been back to Jacksonville. And they heard that one of their own had been elected mayor of Newark, and the Chamber of Commerce invited me back to be the guest speaker. First time I had been back to Jacksonville.

Q: From 46 to.

James: To 86.

Q: That was what, 40 years.

James: I had no reason to go back. My mother and my brother were here. So I had no reason to go back. So in 86 I was the guest speaker at the Chamber of Commerce, Jacksonville, Florida. And they put nine hundred people in a room to welcome their native son home. But I told them I felt I was a native son of Newark, New Jersey, not Jacksonville, Florida. I knew very little if anything about Jacksonville, Florida, other than those fearful experiences as a kid, and the love and caring and sharing of the big extended family that I had. Other than that, I knew nothing about Jacksonville, Florida. Well, we lived on Pittman Street, I remember that. We lived on Pittman Street.

Q: On Pittman Street in Jacksonville.

James: I lived on Pittman Street.

Q: And what kind of neighborhood was that? Exclusively African-American.

James: Typical. Oh yeah, one of those, what do you call, Grapes of Wrath, Bucktown, or the other side of the railroad tracks. Near the funeral, near the graveyard, cemetery. But, you know,



space. They were all homes. It looked like, when I went to the Olympics this year I stayed in a house they preserved where Dr. Martin Luther King was raised. Those old like colonial homes with a porch on it, the big porch that goes around the house. And they were spaced. They were poor, but they were placed. Like land, you know, at least you had space. They weren't crowded. You might have eight on this side, nine on the other side, facing each other. It's almost like the Kind house. When I went to Atlanta and went to St. Orban's Street, to see the King house where he was born. It was a typical house and all those were raised there.

Q: What was your initial housing like when you got to Newark? Where did you live when you first came here?

James: Well, when we first moved to Newark, we lived in one room at Howard Street. Howard and Springfield Avenue which burned down. And then did mother make the purchase on 43 Emmett Street. So we lived, I've forgotten, at Howard and Springfield, a one room apartment. I remember that because we had the outhouse in the backyard. And we had a fire, and the fire people came. We almost lost our lives in a fire. On Howard Street, I almost lost my life in a fire on Wilbur Avenue. So I remember that one room. The bathroom, I tell my kids today, they don't want to talk about it. They think I'm senile. That we had an outhouse in the backyard. They have no idea of what we're talking about. We used to go buy coal. We used to go buy a half loaf of bread. We used to heat the water on top of the pot belly stove and bathe at night. And they're looking at us, like, daddy, something wrong with you. They cannot fathom what I'm talking about. They can't. When I say I used to go get the ice from Pazelwood who was the vendor.

END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

Q: Pot belly stove. Get the big tub. Heat water. We would bathe there and hang out clothes around the pot belly stove. I learned then about coal and kerosene and why so many houses in Newark's old houses probably catch fire because they had makeshift conditions to heat. They didn't have the pot belly stove or the top of the stove. But the top of the stove was a kerosene little

burner, little old round ones, that the wind would blow over or something like that. And then, of course, to go out in December and January to go to the bathroom, you really had to go to the bathroom. You'd go sit in them little houses behind them. So I always find it interesting. I read about Howard Street by our author, because I lived on Howard Street there. In fact, it was right across the street from where Noel's Locksmith used to be. Relocated now from Howard Street to Springfield and houses on the other side to Clinton Avenue. But I lived there in a one room apartment that caught fire. And then eventually mother had the downpayment from working for the restaurant, Woodey's Seafood Market there. And she made a Phillip Mandelbaum purchase. Which in those days, you bought a house and you never paid it off. You paid for it for life.

Q: What was the neighborhood like?

James: Emmett Street?

Q: Yeah.

James: Emmett was always an interesting street. Cobblestone, all white. The Healeys lived in front of me. The McGuinness lived to my left. And we intergrated Emmett Street between Pennsylvania Avenue and Sherman Avenue. The biggest name in that neighborhood. There was Dr. Chase, who lived up around the corner on Pennsylvania Avenue. Dr. Chase. A black man, a doctor, most respected name of Dr. Chase. And they called me nigger on Emmett Street. Went to Miller Street. Most of the kids on there went to St. Columbus School cause they were like Catholic kids. McGuinness and the Healeys and all them. So we were the only black, first black between Pennsylvania Avenue and Vreelinhisen Avenue, and they called me nigger. Then eventually just as, and part of all my life, we didn't run away. We didn't hide. We owned property. We went to school every day. We were clean and neat, but poor. Then I became pat of the gang, like the white gangs. They would say look at them niggers over there. We don't mean you Sharpe. They would talk about niggers, talk about black, but they would always say, we don't mean you Sharpe. Like I was an acceptable black cause I grew up with them. And I have pictures

of all these little, all the white boys and me standing together. I look at them the other day. And this way. Little old Sharpe and my brother Joe survived all these white boys that went St. Columbus and everything else. And that was our gang. And they would talk about blacks, but they didn't mean me. I was an acceptable black. And, you know, I often say how wierd that is. But then, what no one knows today, in the Bensonhurst gang there was a black. We all talk about the Bensonhurst case and what happened, a baseball bat. It would shock people to know today that in that Bensonhurst gang, all that incident talk about, a black was part of their gang. And they probably, probably like the Sharpe guy, he was an acceptable black.

Q: What was the Howard Street neighborhood like?

James: Rough. That was the Central Ward like. Crowded, more tenement, crowded homes together. The busy thoroughfare of South Orange Avenue and Springfield Avenue. Hustle, hustle. Busy. More industrial because right up the street you would come to Prince Street where the market, at that time, the farmer's market which many people came to associate on Mulberry Street in Newark existed on Prince Street then. That whole area up there was a Jewish shopping area. And so as a kid, we would walk up to the Prince Street to go shopping in and out and all like that. And went to, one church that we went to, got the Cub Scouts and the Boy Scouts. But that was a beehive of a shopping area. The merchants were all there. That's where they were. They were not downtown Newark. They were there on the Prince Street between Springfield and South Orange. So that was a beehive. That was a more commercial, industrial, not, no, commercial area, tenement houses, and transit people who'd come from the south who were told there was a rainbow up here in the north, and that the north would be better. And we were finding one room apartments where people were gouging us with rent and everything else. And that's how we lived. Everybody, you'd walk out in the hall with five different rooms. People didn't rent apartments there. It was a room that had families in it because that's all we could afford.

Q: That area on Prince Street, was that mostly a, like a food market area, more so, dry goods.

James: Yes. Food, yes, all that stuff. The oranges would be out, the apples would be out, the nuts and things. It was almost like a foreign country trade market. They would bring the things there and put them on display. And you could go buy onions, potatoes and apples. I remember Chinese apples and sugar cane. You ought to see the sugar cane. Chinese apple. You could, you know, you could all those seed and all that stuff. All that was available then. So it was a rich area of commercial businesses. Primarily owned by Jewish people. And the Jewish people would shop in there then. And this is where most of the blacks were living in. Because they would always sell to you. Sell their property and move to the suburbs. Sell their merchandise to you. So you find that blacks probably in Newark come out of that very ward. And then we found that we could, well, we used to get beat up, go to the South Ward which was predominantly Jewish. Go to the North Ward which was predominantly Italian. Go Iron Bound, they were just people who didn't speak our language. But we all seemed to come out of the core of the Central Ward, and then for better conditions, we had a room, an apartment in the Central Ward, and then we tried to branch out and get an apartment in Wickwake, no Clinton Hill came first. Clinton Hill because we heard that Mrs. Birch lived over there. And Captain Roscoe Jetty lived over there. And Hazelwood lived over there. Like Clinton Hill. So we went from the core of that area to Clinton Hill. Then eventually from Clinton Hill to the South Ward. And then the North Ward was the last place you find blacks moving in in any significant number because Imperiali would beat you up, you know, if he found you on Bloomfield Avenue. You know, the Italians they say they ain't running. We're gonna stay and fight. So it was like, we would never venture. When we used to play Barringer, we were like barred from going to Bloomfield. They would beat us up. Cops would beat us up. And then, of course, we used to play Wickwake. We'd walk through the Wickwake section cops would beat us up, Jewish kids would beat you up. But the cops would run you out of there like you didn't belong there. Get back over there on lower Clinton Hill where you belong Shabam.

So Newark has really changed. I've seen the segregation in the south. I've seen quote, unquote, not overt, but covert segregation in the north. And again, it was not based on neighborhoods. It was different in the south. In the south, you lived together, but you had to be a boy, stay in your place. In the north, they didn't want to live together.

Q: We talked about this, the shopping for food and food products on Prince Street. Where did you shop for dry goods, like clothing, etc.?

James: Springfield Avenue and then the man came to your house. But it was always a Jewish guy who would come with a car, open the trunk of his car, and mother would say, pick out what you want now. And then he would give mama, he had a credit card for mother. I remember that man used to come. I don't recall his name. Bought all our clothes on credit. Or you went to Springfield Avenue. You shop, everything you needed was on Springfield Avenue. And then if you didn't like Springfield Avenue, you went down to, the biggest thing there was Robert Hall off Broad Street on Murray Street. Robert Hall had a low overhead. I remember when I graduated, never had a suit up to graduation. And mother grabbed us by the ear and took us to Robert Hall, low overhead. We went upstairs on Murray Street, right off Broad Street, on Robert Hall and got our first blue suit for graduation. That was our first suit when we graduated from Miller Street School.

Q: Were there any black merchants among the persons who had?

James: None. Never saw a black merchant. Never saw one. The first one, I think in the, oh yeah, the one I saw was Bird the milkman who I worked for. Frank Bird lives now at the corner of Randolph and Clinton Place, and his brother has the place on Bergen Street. But Frank Bird, who lived on Emmett Street, was the milkman, and I worked on his truck. Get up at four, five o'clock, school day, and deliver bottles of milk. That was the only merchant I knew. The black milkman

And at the time the insurance people were white. Everyone who came to your house, the service was white. It's only when Newark's population shift that you see black insurance people, blacks driving the bus. When Newark was four hundred thousand and white majority, we had none of those jobs. It's only when we moved that that stopped, and they became fearful of coming into our community, bus drivers changed, the insurance people changed, Public Service people changed, everything. It was not that way in the beginning. It was no different than the south. We



were powerless, did not have jobs. Which is what the struggle was

And I think that's the thing that people don't talk about. It was always perceived that if you went north, things would be better. You know what Dr. Martin Luther King said. He thought he had seen the worse segregation in Mississippi and Alabama until he came to Chicago and walked through the streets of Cicero. Same thing what we found. It wasn't, it didn't say whites only. It didn't say colored only, didn't say black. But it was as covert as could be without warning. And you could not get an opportunity.

Q: And you felt that.

James: Yes Yes. And we went to the black restaurants, Woodey and soul food. And even Mrs. Stewart had a restaurant down on Avon Avenue. She had one on Seventh Avenue. She didn't start a line there where she had stayed. She used to have that quick entrance right there at Avon and Bergen Street. And they had other restaurants, Eureka and all of them on Brunswick Street there, right near Wright Street. We had more restaurants, more of our own, under a segregated society than we have now. Coleman Hotel. They had a restaurant. We had everything we needed under segregation. Our own hotel, our own stores, our own merchants began to grow. Integration brought competition where we lost many of our beginning industries and businesses because there'd be people like. That's very interesting. Where's our Coleman Hotel?

Q: We have problems now that we didn't have even then under the most severe circumstances. Now that's interesting. How old were you and when did you first notice the use of such things as liquor and drugs and.

James: Never drank, never smoked in my life.

Q: I mean among our people did you? You were nine years old when you left Jacksonville. Did you, had you ever experienced or noticed black people using drugs or?

James: Not part of our vocabulary. Only thing we used was snuff. Snuff was the only thing that I remember the people. I used to wonder why people put snuff in their mouths. And then they'd spit the tobacco. Snuff and tobacco was the only thing in the black community I knew growing up. Snuff. Go get me some snuff. Grandma would send me to go get a little can of snuff and tobacco. They would chew, they would chew, even the women, chew the tobacco and spit it back, and all that. I didn't want to smoke it. It taste horrible. But I used to halfway and spit it. And they would leave it on the. They could sit on the porch and spit eight feet out, ten feet out. And that was your, and then they used to have the thing called a spittoon.

Q: A spittoon.

James: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That chew tobacco and spit and snuff and spit. That's what we did.

Q: No moonshine.

James: Well, they drank liquor. That was like a weekday, a workday. It's always been such black people on payday would get drunk. Would sit in cars and pass the bottle around and drink. That's been a creation of the white man. In the south they wouldn't pay them much and give them liquor. The theory has always been that the reward for black people working was to have fun on the weekend with liquor, fire water. And they would forget that they were underpaid, forget how it was during the week. So we as a race of people have been told, you know, and that's the old story to tell white folks. If you could be black just one Friday and Saturday, you'd never want to be white again. Again with that stereotype that after work our reward is to get drunk and to party and to act like a fool. Not to say how much you going to pay me? What benefits I have, what health care here. Meet and drink and get plastered and forget the labors of the week and forget that you're being underpaid. And then, of course, you know, the real tragedy, forget to bring some money home. Did you get paid today? Well, we stopped by and drunk it all up. Then the fights would start.

So I had seen that scenario where people get drunk on weekends and not have money to

come home to the family. And it almost became a repulsive sight in my eyes. So I have fought against that. I fought against the stereotype of seeing that. Never want to chew the tobacco, never wanted to dip snuff, and didn't want to drink because it made us the baffoon in our community.

Q: Mr. James, what about medical services? Could you compare the medical services available in Jacksonville with what was available to you when you came to Newark?

James: Well, the difference is that in the south you had a black hospital. Certain hospitals would only accept black people. So you could get hurt, be needing medical attention, be ill, and they would drive past the white hospital where you could die to only get to the black hospital. So clearly we were second class citizens in terms of medical care. There was no value on your life. And you, and like I say, you could get hit in the head outside a white hospital just playing there, and you would bleed to death because they would drive you across town to the black hospital. Up here in Newark, you could go to any hospital, but the treatment was never as warm, sensitive, caring that you would expect. So they tolerated you. And then, of course, they would make all kinds of questions about can you pay, do you have this, do you have that. That was even before, I remember emergency medical person was hit with a baseball bat, bleeding profusely. We took him to one of the local hospitals, and they stand over him talking about do you have Blue Cross, do you have Blue Shield, do you have whatever it was at the time. And we're saying treat the person. They're more concerned if we treat you this African-American, will we be paid, will we get reimbursed. As opposed to the general welfare of the individual.

So, up north, there was excellent medical facilities, but you were still treated second class. In the south, it was segregated facilities that greatly risked your life if you were injured getting to the only designated black hospital.

Q: In many areas in the south, including where I grew up, a lot of people believed in fixing people, like voodoo and whodo and all of that kind of stuff. Did you ever come across any of that or?

James: I've seen Caribbean people; I've never seen black people. I've seen Caribbean people say I got a hex on me or something like that.

Q: A hex.

James: A hex, yeah, a hex on you. And I've seen them take dolls and --

Q: Stick pins.

James: But I've never believed in that, and I always thought it was rather unfortunate; I just thought it didn't make sense. And I became more fearful with people like that thinking perhaps there was something wrong with their sanity. Because I was never into a Caribbean. A lot of people, strictly southern people, they didn't believe in that. And I always hear about people who have, they had a funny language, talked with a dialect. My assumption was they're from an island, and this is part of their religious upbringing, and I wanted no part of it. So when I would hear, see or become involved in instances like that, I would excuse myself and try to get away from it. And then I'd kid myself is that person crazy? What's wrong with that person? But it was just never a part of my family structure. Now if you have Caribbean people, they go through some rituals. Animals and chickens. But we never had that. I guess we were, again, we were struggling, we were struggling on the earth to stay alive, to get an education. And it wasn't part of that equation, it just didn't make sense.

Q: What about pets? Did you ever own pets when you were a kid?

James: I think the community owned pets. Like there was always a neighborhood cat, a neighborhood dog. I lived next door to. The kids today talk about pit bulls. Well, we had one on Emmett Street called Blackie. And Blackie was my neighbor's, and so he would jump through the window. He would chase cats. He would chase people. Chase cars. But he knew everybody on the street. And Blackie, here was a mean vicious dog, but if he knew you, you could walk

around. But as soon as a stranger came on by, Blackie would growl and chase them and everybody would have to go out with sticks and Blackie get on back. So it seemed like animals developed territories. And one neighbor would feed him too. I think what it was we were poor, we felt animals would alert us. It was our built-in security. We didn't have alarm systems, but a dog barking, who out there, who out there? Even bad cats.

Q: Was this in Jacksonville or here?

James: More up here.

Q: I don't remember in Jacksonville pets or anything. But up north, it was fashionable to have dogs and cats. And especially dogs were your warning. They were your alert. They were the alarm system that you couldn't afford. And they became like community. If I didn't feed my dog, he knew that so and so would leave food behind her house, and they would go from one house to the other house. And the only danger came if people began to compete with pets. Like my pet's better than yours. My dog, you know. There was always a risk that people would poison, put poison in the food for the animals coming into their yard and what have you. So there you began to have to curb your dog, train your dog. Cause neighbors, especially where dogs would defecate on their property, people say well I'll fix him up with some poison. So, but the pets were funny. And even today, like, you know, you have to take care of them. But they get territorial. They accept some people and they reject others.

Q: Was there any juvenile delinquency as we know it now that you remember from Jacksonville or what kind of juvenile delinquency?

James: None in Jacksonville as a youth because you had no rights. The police didn't like. It was not a case of maybe you did it or you have representation. They would accuse you and beat you. They would accuse you and lock you up. They would accuse you and do something to your family. So under, it was like apartheid, you didn't dare break a law under the system in the south



because blacks would be penalized. And mama couldn't save you, papa couldn't save you. Interesting how a white couple just got two years for beating a black kid. It was in yesterday's paper. It was common then.

Q: Where was that, you know, the couple beat up that kid? I saw it on television.

James: But then it was you beat you, and you had no recourse. Your family could do nothing. Police would bring you back with a swollen eye, a big lip. The neighbors, the white neighbors, do something. So you always knew that if you did something and got caught there would be a penalty and the penalty would be a severe one. Up here in the early beginning, there was not that much juvenile. When I grew up, there were no drugs, there was no alcohol for kids. You roamed the streets, you played games, you played booties up, and you jumped hop scotch out of the best double dutch jumpers in the neighborhood. I outjumped the girls. Even today I get fascinating when I see them turn the rope. I say can I try. You can't jump. Let me show you what Emmett Street used to do. First you got to get in. That getting in. I'd jump all day, hop and skip. Cause as a kid growing up, we'd play hop scotch and we did. And the boys played, we had the yo yos that could sleep. And booties up and all those games. And stick ball. Yes, Sharpe played four years of high school ball and college, because if I could hit a high bounce with that pink ball and a broomstick, you know I could hit the white ball with a baseball bat. But kids those days used to play stick ball. You would throw that ball a little over high bounce, a pink ball. First you'd play on the steps booties up, and you hit it off the wall, and get a single, double. Then we used to pitch it. And you'd have a broom stick. That's what you could afford. And a pink ball and you could hit it. And when we went to high school, we were great ball player. Kids don't do them things today. So we grew up, not with drugs, not with alcohol, but grew up with all the games that kids play. We were children first and then became men. Today they're men and then they get older and become children. But we were children. Riding a Schwinn bicycle with the knee action for the first time. I worked at Western Union delivering telegrams on a bicycle. One of the greatest thrills of my life. So, no, there was no crime. We just, we were kids growing up. The school playgrounds were all open. My mother would come and call for me. Cmon it's time to come

home. And I would come out of Miller Street School gym playing with no sneakers sometime because we couldn't afford them. When my sneakers got holes in them, we put cardboard in them.

They used to call me a lemon-lime kid because my mother bought them old work pants, those green work pants. I used to wear them. They didn't know I had two pairs. I would wash them, hang them by the stove. But people say, Sharpe, my nickname was the lemon lime kid. And we used to have old sneakers PF Flyers or BF Flyers and army sneakers. They used to laugh at us and say, oh your mama wear army sneakers. But they were the first ones Mother would walk in the store and get at a discount. Tied together. Dollar ninety-eight. Today, raising my kids, if you don't buy designer, you don't send them with Air Jordan, they won't wear the shoes to school. Kids like that. In those days it was give me the least expensive pair. And then when they wear out, put cardboard in them and wear them another three months. And we wore our our dungarees, and my green lemon-lime pants. I had holes in them from falling and everything. Today you buy them with holes in them. Then you wore the holes in them. So things have changed. It's just funny like.

Q: So what was your perception of blacks helping each other in Newark? And how did that compare with?

James: Didn't help that much. We never got the feeling of extended family in the north because everybody was working, trying to survive, going to school, going to work, moving around. Never got the feeling. In the south, most families lived under one roof. The Jones on the first floor, the Jones on the second floor, the Jones in the back, or the Jones living in a house on the same lot in the back. Up north it was everybody for themselves. And it became impersonal. You know, it became impersonal. You didn't maybe know the person because they just moved in. You're fearful of the person. You didn't know who they were. So up north the living became impersonal and survival. Whereas during the worst times in the south there was just extended family feeling, caring and sharing, everybody was together. You felt community more. Not up north. It was, you know, the apartment next door someone just moved out. I saw a mattress on top of the truck.

It was always transient. Cause we was. We lived on Huyler Street, let's move. Went to Robert Treect school, let's move. When we bought the house, move. It was struggle because too many of us came north without skills, without an education, thinking it was the promise land, and then we were disillusioned.

Q: You talked about it before, but how would you compare overall relations with whites in Newark in comparison to relations with whites in down south?

James: Well, the relationship in the south was one of you were the good boy, good nigger. They treated you like, patronize you. Yeah. Good boy. I like you now, you be good now. Up here when they were charge, we were powerless. Irving Turner became our only symbol of power. They never shared the power with us. That is the tragic thing. We had to struggle to sieze power, and I think our treatment of the minority was not white has been what America's all about. As opposed to how the white majority treated us when we were the minority. When we were a minority, we were a minority. We were the last hired, the first fired. And we got the crumbs from the table. And that's why it's interesting today, you know, it's reversed, and yet, some of them are still exercising power. You look at some action, and I say, I don't understand it. When I was on this city council upstairs, it was seven two white, six three. They never gave the minority what they wanted. They always got what they wanted. But we always try to be so benevolent, so over caring, we're gonna be for everybody. They take it from, go walk through the Korean boycott, shop at the store. They voted 66 to 30 for Giuliani. He's going to Israel, get on his knees and pray at the Wailing Wall. The Jewish community voted 66 and 2/3 for Giuliani. We are for everybody. Nobody's for us. We have to learn that we do not have to apologize for being pro our people. It doesn't mean that you're disrespecting other people. It doesn't mean that you're hostile. It doesn't mean that you deny them the right. But it also means that you have ethnic pride, and that you recognize that your election was an empowerment of your people. And they deserve opportunity, they deserve to share in that victory. What good is it if African-Americans for the most part elevate you to positions of leadership, and then the others benefit. It makes no sense. And Dave Dinkins, prime example. Said he was going to be major for all the people. He sat in office and we

lost and he lost because he didn't feed the face that put him in there.

Q: Do you think that because so few of us make it, so to speak, in this society is because of a lack of initiative on our part to a great degree or do you think it's the system?

James: It's both. The system works against us. It is not the slave master's intent to free the slaves. Divide and conquer. The Irish have no majority. So they divide the Italians and the blacks and they get there also. We have an Irish chairman. Surrogate, but he was Irish. He don't have the numbers to warrant that. It's always been divide and conquer. How tragic to read the Nixon Papers that have now been unsealed where he says --

END SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

Q: Hire black. So that was divide and conquer. We still have that today, where black people are running against one another funded by the other committee. Not for them to win, but to make sure that the other blacks lose and to make sure that their interest is protected. And we have to guard against that. The other day I stood in Trenton, it's all the mayors in the Hall of Fame, those who served ten or more years come forward. Fifty mayors of New Jersey League of went forward. Called my name and I looked left and right, and I was the only black who'd been a mayor for ten years. And then I thought how tragic. And then I realized it's the same situation all over again. Blacks fighting from within against each other, the old crab in the basket pulling down. And whites fighting from outside. So I looked at each star, Hatcher and Carter Cooper, all administrated by the white man. I looked at Orange, Brown, Hackett all administrated by the white man. I looked at Irvington still in those all administrated by the white man. I looked at Plainfield, Furey and Taylor and others. And here is Sharpe James sits in the middle of controversy where I have African-Americans trying to tear me down. Took an oath of office to help build the city, and then you have the others trying to put me on the wall as a trophy. Because I'm a successful African-American who can afford a boat, who can afford a summer home. It's not a crime to have worked thirty years, hold three jobs, and my wife works. I don't smoke, drink, keep late

hours, go out with fast women. Someone just as slow as my wife.

So I purchase what I can afford. So that I'm just saying that we have to really understand that although slavery ended, the mentality is still there. And the doctrine of it, we can separate them. We can conquer them. If we separate them, we keep them powerless. And somehow we have to understand that we have to buy our differences for the good of our people, the good of our community, and go on.

Q: Now, let's kind of get back to Sharpe James the mayor. And what was your first job in Newark?

James: Oh, I 76 Lyons Avenue, I was a sophomore in school. And the teacher called me in the room, Sharpe, you've got to stop telling jokes, you got to stop fooling. What are you gonna be graduate here? You gotta stop fooling in class. You're always telling jokes and you're always fooling. I said I have no idea. She said, what about college? I said, college. And then she said, you need a job. So she sent me to Tiny Town Juvenile Store, 76 Lyons Avenue. Morris Kaplan, Sally Kaplan [?]. And they hired, sent this sophomore at Soutside High School over to the Wickwake section of Newark, Bergen and Lyon, to set up toys at Tiny Town Juvenile Store. Hello, I'm Sharpe James. Mrs. Blumenthal, the guidance counselor, sent me here to the shop. Well, can you set up toys, set up bicycle. I'm sure I can. So I started setting up tricyles. And I set up the wagons. And he was saying, well, I'm going to the store. They went to Henry's Luncheonette on Bergen Street, the number one restaurant in Newark at that time, Henry's Luncheonette. I'll be right back. Fine, sir, I be here setting up the wagons, setting up the tricycles. And while they were gone, someone would come in the store, Jewish community. We want to buy Scrabble. It was a big thing. Well, they went to the store. Cost. You have the exact change because I wouldn't dare go to the cash register. So I tried to make change, leave the money on the cash register. He'd come back. What's this money doing here. I said, somebody gave me money, they wanted Scrabble. You sold them Scrabble? Yes, sir. I didn't go in the cash register. Go to the store again. I'll be back. And when you finish setting up them wagons, make sure you sweep the floor. Make sure you keep yourself busy. Yes, sir. And if you finish the floor, go out



and wash my car. Yes, sir. So they would leave, go up to Henry Street, sit down and eat their sandwich. Someone would come in and say I want to buy a crib.

Q: Want to buy a what?

James: A crib.

Q: For a baby.

James: Yes.

Q: Yeah okay. Okay.

James: Want a crib. Well, they had one crib and another crib and another crib. And, you know, where he lived, making a living. How much. I said, well I can't go to Kenney but I'll write it down. He come, oh Mr. Kaplan, while you were gone this guy wanted this crib, and I got his name and address and told him the price. You did what? I just told him. And they want to buy a crib. You talked to them. Yes, Mr. Kaplan, I talked to them. He would call the people up, yeah, that is the finest salesman you have there. He's not a salesman, he's just. He's a fine salesman that you go there. He not a salesman, that's the boy that set up the toys and wagons. Well, I'm telling you he's a nice young man. That went on for about a month. And finally Mr. Kaplan realized that I could sell cribs, sell Scrabble, do anything in that store, ring the cash register, and I could be a salesman from Tiny Town Juvenile Store. So eventually Morris Kaplan learned that I could sell. I became the number one salesman in the Jewish store, Tiny Town Juvenile Store, became the number one buyer for him, set up all the toys in that new school that opened up there at Maple Avenue and Lyons. All the Jewish furniture stores began to know me. The Bushberg Brothers, and then of course, now some forty-six years later, you read in the paper where Sally Bushberg had adopted a daughter and couldn't find the other one. And came to see me. And with the help of the Star Ledger and Pam we found the other daughter after forty-six years. Because they were

twins, adopted at the hospital, never met. She said, Sharpe, Sally Bushberg, I'm dying and I want to leave my daughter with another family. This is the same Sally Bushberg who was the husband of Morris Kaplan who I worked for in Tiny Town starting in 1952. I graduated high school in 54 so I worked for them for two years. So that was my first job. My first job was one of being able to sell and to communicate with people, to be trustworthy. And I went from that job to be the first one hired at Bamberger's on the seventh floor to sell TVs, well the TVs. First black they allowed to go to the cash register. I was the first black in Tiny Town to be able to use the register, to be able to sell. I was the first black on the seventh floor at Bamberger's during the holidays selling TVs and all that stuff. So I learned that I can sell. I learned that I can talk. I learned that I can communicate with people.

Q: Will you identify who Pam is for the?

James: Pam Goldstein has been my director of public information. A Jewish young lady, Pam Goldstein, who formerly worked for Newark City Council doing public relations work. And when I became mayor in 1986 she moved from the Council's public relations staff to be my director of public information. So, when Sally Bushberg called me from Bradenton, Florida, and said, Sharpe, Jimmie, I need help. I want you to help find my daughter's twin. And then she, of course she talked about remember as how I remember Jimmie. They could never believe my last name was James. I remember Jimmie at Tiny Town, he worked for us. And so I've kept information for Bushberg Brothers on Springfield Avenue, still there. That was her brother. Sally Bushberg married Kaplan. So she was a Sally Bushberg Kaplan. And her brothers are still there. One died. On Springfield Avenue. And, of course, Tiny Town moved to the highway at the time that Morris died. It's been a long way. But I got my start there. That's my first job where I was hired to set up bicycles and toys and wagons, ended up being a salesperson and buyer and trusted enough to go into the cash register and then to Bamberger's seventh floor to be trusted to sell televisions and go into the cash register.

Q: How far was this job located from your home and how did you get to work? And then --

James: Took a bus or walked from Miller Street, from Southside High School, Johnson Avenue, to the Wickwake section, all the way up Elizabeth Avenue, to 76 Lyons Avenue. Right there next to Sharmaro, used to be Sharmaro Furs right next door.

Q: How far, approximately how far was that in distance?

James: Oh, about six, seven miles. Walked most times.

Q: Really.

James: Had no transportation. I would walk.

Q: In general, how were you treated by your supervisor or by your boss on that first job?

James: I think what they learned. I've always knew the hostility that would be generated to me as an African-American. And I would always work at work. I was always a workaholic. So, when people hired, okay, me to set up the toys, I did that. Or sweep the floor, whatever. What they were saying was I don't want to see you standing around. I didn't say, well, that's not my job, you hired me. Sir, I'll sweep the floor. And I swept the floor, cleaner than anybody else. And then when I would set up the toys, sweep the floor, and he would see you finished that, he'd say, well, go out there and wax my car. Well, now I knew waxing the car was not part of my job description. Had to go out and wax the car better. So I've had maybe three or four jobs where white folks tested me. And in each of those cases, because I didn't fear work, because I was committed to keep my eyes on the prize of wanting to save money to get an education, to get out, to be able to better myself and my family, my mother, my brother, I've always looked upon those challenges as a hurdle. And when they would come, I would expect them, and I would try to pre-hurdle them. And to continue because they would not be part of my life forever. But I'm part of their life forever. They still love me fifty years later for their maltreatment when I was a youth. But their maltreatment I simply hurdled, and in so doing, they became fond of me. And it served

my purpose of being able to get a job, maintain a job, and use that to move on in life.

Q: Were you ever unemployed from the time you began work?

James: Always. Because every job I had I did so well and got so many recommendations. I could always get another job because the people said, I don't want him to leave now. He works, he's a good worker. I've always taken every job and had a rule that I wanted to be the best. I always wanted, whatever I did, I tried to be better than anybody else. It's just, it's in me. I'm an athlete, and I competitive in sports and competitive in the job I want to be the best mayor. I wanted to be the best councilman. And maybe that's why I'm the only ward councilman ever elected at large I'm the only councilman at large ever elected mayor. Because in each of those tasks I wanted to be the best. I wanted to be the best ward councilman. I'm the first to run unopposed in 1978. I wanted to be the best mayor. I ran unopposed in 1990. And then, of course, there are dangers in that because we're never going to let that happen again. We're gonna get him next time. But I'm not concerned about that. I'm only concerned that we're only on this earth for a precious short time. And our goal is to be the best at whatever I do.

I remember what the president of Morehouse College said, the late, and his name will come to me, and Martin Luther King adopted it. He was there only for twenty-seven years, the president was. And when Dr. King walked across that stage he said, Martin, you be the best. Do it so well that even the dead can't complain.

Q: Wasn't it Dr. Mays?

James: Yeah, Dr. Mays.

Q: Benjamin Mays.

James: Benjamin Mays. He was there for twenty-seven years. And he gave that degree to Martin and charge to be the best. He gave it to Maynard Jackson and said be the best. He gave it to

Julian Bond and say be the best. He gave it to Lerome Benett, the African-American historian, said be the best. He gave it to Congressman Major Owens in New York and said be the best. He gave it to one of the most articulate clergymen in the world, Reverend Moss, and said be the best. Just reading that. I tried the same. And what he said, in my space and in my time and God's grace, whatever job opportunity I'm given, I'm going to try to be the best. He said, if you're gonna sweep floors, sweep it like Beethoven would play. If you're gonna shine shoes, shine them like the guy who painted Mona Lisa, Leonardo da Vinci painted Mona Lisa. That's we have to be about, black. Forget racism, it's there. Forget the hostility, it's gonna be there. Our charge is still to be the best despite that. And that makes you better.

Q: What were the common occupations for African-Americans when you first came to Newark?

James: A laborer. Housework. You could do the labor work. You were the sweat and brow. Anything, digging holes and doing the labor. You could be in the kitchen. You were around food, like in the army and navy. And you couldn't, you could cook. You can be in the kitchen. You could clean in the hospital, be an orderly. So it was hospital work, it was kitchen work, it was labor. We were the engine that turned this country around. Perhaps that's why back there they had the most famous play and the famous were A Day of Absence. That if we didn't show up one day, Susie's kitchen wouldn't be clean, clothes wouldn't be washed. They couldn't, you know, do those kinds of. We were the service. We were the engines and pistons of this nation. And we did the things white folks didn't want to do.

Q: What kind of progress can you identify that blacks have made in terms of jobs?

James: I think education. I think first education. Inner schools, they're leaving the city. So, as they left the city, they left a void. And we had to come into the school system, we had to come into all of the service agencies in our cities. They abandoned the cities and we quickly had to develop those skills to fill those positions in our cities. So we went from the labor and industry to a service organization. We are the secretaries, we are the teachers. Then, of course, labor to



professional. Our children. But I don't think it was the first wave that went into the professional. We first went into the service, and our children became the doctors and the lawyers to challenge them even at those levels. And then, of course, we always had the entertainment, but that was limited and that was more inspiration. The two areas that have given us false hope has been entertainment and sports. One half of one percent becomes a Michael Jordan. But there are a lot of frustrated jocks on the playground who wanted to be Michael Jorden. Denzel Washington and Whitney are doing great, but if you know how many unemployed black actors and actresses there are, you'd never want that career. We see the few who make it. You know, the once was a guy who started at Livingston, Sydney Portier. You know, not too long when Louis Armstrong was the first one on TV, followed by Nat King Cole. They boycotted it, Irish Soap, and forced him off TV because he couldn't get commercial support. Hey, that was just yesterday. So that industry is late.

Q: Do you belong to a church now?

James: My wife joined Elizabeth Avenue United Presbyterian Church and was always a member. And that church will always be fond of us because when my son was shot in 1985, December 5, 1985, left for dead on the streets of Newark, that church for the first time in twenty years on Saturday had a revival. If it were not for them being open for the first time in twenty years on Saturday, and had a revival meeting for my son, left bleeding to death, crawl a hundred feet, hearing voices in that church, falling down the steps, and the churchman has become an angel of hope, taking off their white garments and wherever they saw blood mopping it up, wherever they saw a hole in his body sticking their white garment in. One of them recognized he was my son. Called up the house. Mary was in New York shopping with Sylvia Ross that day. My son might be alive today. So our family belongs to that church. But that is a Presbyterian Church and I'm a Baptist. So as an elected official, I get calls to go to all the churches. Every Sunday I get invitation to be in every church. Reverend Lawrence Robbie said come to the First Methodist where my son is buried. He broke away from the. Reverend Matson said come to Clearview. Reverend Rankin would say come to his church, and Reverend Stafford would say come to his.

As an elected official, I go to all of them. I try to visit one every Sunday. Skip a Sunday because of schedule. So I find myself going to as many as possible out of respect for the work they do. Out of respect for their ministry. Because they don't want to see the mayor come just in election year. They hold that against you. Well, we only see you at election time. So I try to periodically visit all of them. I enjoy the religious and spiritual message. I enjoy the camaraderie of being there.

I remember I went to World's Cathedral, when Bishop Chancellor Owens, was down in Georgia, bishop over the whole area, gave a sermon about the monkey in people. How the monkey will take care of his young. He said, put bananas in the ceiling of the cage, and they will work together, stack the pots or something, and then one monkey will climb up and hand the bananas down to the others. You won't find that in people. I've got to get that. I've been to all of the choirs. I had to go to New Hope, Reverend Charles, to hear Sissey and Anne --

Q: Sissey Houston.

James: And Anne, you know, daughter. Whitney. Where the president, took the president. I enjoy all of them. I'm really a Baptist. I think the others sit a little too quiet for me. I still believe as I told one church, you can cheer the lord just as you cheer at a ballgame. You can cheer, and enjoy it and celebrate. You don't have to sit there with an open hand, what have you. So I find the church to be a spiritual hope for all of us. I'm always guided by the fact that if we came this far, my faith.

Q: I've known for a very long time about your speaking ability, but what about other talents? Do you sing, Sharpe? [Laughter]

James: Contrary to rumors that all African-Americans sing and dance. I do not sing, but I'm able to dance. Although, interesting though I should tell it different, for four years I sang in the college choir. The only black in the choir. But singing has never been a real interest to me until late in life when it's too late to train your vocal chord. But I've always been a dancer. People just know me dancing. I've always been an athlete so I'm the senior tennis champ for the City of Newark.

They know me as a coach; they know me as a teacher. But tennis and swimming and skiing. I think I'm almost what they call the athletic John. I've been gifted in sports. Whatever sport I played, I've been talented and gifted. They thought I was going to be a professional baseball player, and they thought I'd be a professional football player. So sports I'm gifted. I guess it goes back to what I say about jobs. I'm a fundamentalist. Whatever I do, I read on, I study on. I deal with fundamentals. I try to learn my job and try to learn the sport. So I'm able to be taught. So in baseball or swimming, tennis and all those things. I'm actually exceptionally good. I played with Arthur Ashe in tennis. I kicked Dave Dinkins in the eye that everyone got mad at cause he's too slow for me. So I think sports and now boating and fishing have interested me. So I've come a little off the physical part of tennis, swimming, skiing. I'm now into boating and fishing.

Q: Mayor James, the last time we had spoken we had talked about your church affiliation. So today we're going to start with your participation in cultural and social. Mayor James, have you participated in social and cultural activities in Newark?

James: Well, social and cultural happen to be one of the strenghts of our community and certainly something I support actively. I happen to be a lover of the arts. Someone who frequents the arts as an individual by out of personal choice. And then, of course, we're proud that Newark, New Jersey, after a long, bitter fight will house the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. But I think the history of Newark is one of the arts. When we talk about Sarah Vaughn and talk about Melba Moore. We talk about Keisha Campbell. We talk about Connie Francis. We talk about, from my high school, Southside, Gloria Gainer. The arts have always been here in the City of Newark.

Q: Let me start you there a moment because what I want to get to right now is like social and cultural organizations such as maybe the Elks or the Masons or bridge clubs, literary societies, and that kind of thing.

James: Oh. Omega Pfi Psi.

Q: Yeah. That'll do.

James: I'm a member of Omega Pfi Psi and, of course, a member of Bethany Lodge 31, Prince Hall. So I'm a Mason. And I was pledged to be a member of the Omega Pfi Psi. And I am very active in those organizations. But more importantly, I enjoy them because of the fellowship. People coming together to care for one another. To share ideas. It's about people, and especially when you come away from the political arena, which often times is a dog fight. Often time it has terrible choices and consequences. It's good to belong to a Prince Hall, to be a Mason. It's good to be a member of a fraternity, Omega Pfi Psi, where the whole thrust, how can we help one another, how can we better serve our community. So my life has been enriched by participation in those organizations. And, of course, NAACP, our local chapter and national chapter as well.

Q: When did you first join any of those organizations that you just talked about?

James: Well, the NAACP always from the beginning. I've recognized the organization as being the oldest, most prestigious, most powerful, most recognized social civil rights organization that we've had. And I've felt it was a badge of honor to be a member. So even right after high school and into college I became a member. And now I'm proud to say I'm a life member. A life member. As for the Prince Hall, that came early on when I was elected. No, Hill who was then business administrator for the city and others in City Hall who told me about the good work of the Masons and why don't we pledge. Why don't you join? Of course, I was frightened in the beginning. Would I measure up? Would I be accepted? Could I endure the teachings and the tribulations to become a member. I did that. And I'm proud of that decision. And then later, maybe about ten years ago, someone again pledged me to Omega Pfi Psi. And again, it was not about my title, not about portfolio, and they gave me a rough going over. I still have some scars. I like to tell people I can still remember the tribulation of being blindfolded and some other things done to you. But I endured. Now I'm a member. And I would like to believe that I'm a better person today for having joined these commendable organizations because of their commitment to self-esteem, self-improvement and then what can we give back to the community at large.

Q: What positions did you hold or do you hold in any of them?

James: Because of my busy schedule as an educator and as an elected official, I have been a member of the housing committee in both organizations. And generally helped them with fund-raising activities. But I've never sought a title or to be an officer because I felt I could not give them the proper time needed, not could I justify being in a position when I would not be able to have the full time to serve. I think that's one of the weaknesses that we as elected officials sometime place on ourselves. That we try to be too many things to too many people. All things to all people. And carry too many titles that we really cannot fulfill. So I've tried simply to tell them you may want to promote me or suggest that I chair a committee or hold office or title, I do not have that time. But I'm thankful and grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the organization and do what I can to assist. And as I stated earlier, it mainly falls upon my ability to assist in fund-raising and my ability to help with housing and, of course, the education committee of these organizations.

Q: Okay that answers a question about what role you have played in the organizations. Do you know anything about the history of either the Masons or the NAACP?

James: Well, the NAACP I've been a student of that struggle, and I've been an admirer of the late, great and former secretary of the NAACP, Walter White. I know all of his tribulations going to the south, thinking he was a white man. And he would go into those towns, Mississippi, Alabama, organize, get back on the train. And white people would say we just can't wait until that white Walter White. Yeah, we're going to tar and feather him. Little did they know, they escorted him off the train and on the train. And he had left an organization. Then, of course, Thurgood Marshall of the tremendous decision there, Brown vs. Ferguson, Plescy vs. Ferguson. Topeka, Kansas.

Q: Board of Education.



James: Board of Education. And the whole legal structure of the NAACP to end that doctrine of separate but never equal. And then, of course, Benjamin Hooks who has even visited Newark. So the NAACP by the very nature of its activity, by the very nature of its profile leaders who inspired, who gave us hope, I've learned about it, read about the NAACP, and became an active participant and supporter of that organization. The fraternity I've not been as active in fraternity, thinking sometime that this was for the rich and the snobbish and boujeous. And I said maybe by then taking Sharpe James in it will change overnight. And then, of course, with the Masons, however, again that goes back to fellowship and real people, the struggle of that and the need to come together for survival as well as our spiritual being of the self.

Q: How much have you participated in political activities in Newark?

James: Oh, that has been a full plate. As a councilman running in 1970 as part of the community's choice team with Mayor Ken Gibson and a whole host of candidates who came out of the first black and Puerto Rican convention, a historical slate, community's choice. Being the only and first councilman to run unopposed in 1978. Being the only councilman to be elected at large in the City of Newark. And being the only Councilman to serve as mayor, having been a district leader, 39th South Ward, since 1970 when Donald Payne knocked on my door and asked me to run. I've held in the City of Newark almost every political office there is in a municipal government and as a district leader. So it has been part of my lifestyle. I was drafted by the people. I think the most important thing to say is that I didn't.

END SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO; BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE THREE

Q: We were talking about outstanding blacks that you met.

James: Coming to Newark. And we talked about Jessie Jackson coming to Newark to help make our community's choice team possible. Percy Sutton coming to Newark and lending his help. Fan Neuhema who came and joined hands with us. Even James Brown and Sammie Davis, Jr.,

coming to raise money to make this political renaissance possible in the City of Newark. So we've been blessed that other national leaders have come here. How about Dr. Martin Luther King who came to Newark one week before his death, March 27th, 1968. Who came to my high school, Southside High School, stood on that stage with a capacity crowd, saying he was tired. And Dr. King looked at a capacity student body and said, learn baby learn so you can earn baby earn. He had that phrase before another person came with his chain and medallion. And again he was here at the time, Adam Clayton Powell, coming across because of that booming voice, that big cigar and telling that. So King, saying the doors of opportunity are wide open, but you can't walk through them if you're drunk, if you're on drugs. Take advantage of this opportunity. Walk through that door. And then, of course, Dr. King left, he went on to Patterson, New Jersey. Took a plane back to Atlanta, then on to Memphis, Tennessee, where he was felled by an assassin April the fourth, 1968. So we take great pride and honor and homage in the fact that the last week of his life, this great humanitarian, this Nobel Peace Prize winner, this great American, who was an ordinary but an extraordinary individual, Dr. Martin Luther King, spent part of the last week of his life here in the City of Newark encouraging us to do better for self-esteem, for self-awareness, for advancement. So when you've seen the Kings and the Clayton Powells and the Reverend Jessie Jackson, the Fanny Lou Hamers, the James Brown and Sammie Davis coming here. All coming here to help us. It inspired us that we could be better. That we could make a difference in Newark, which at that time we were suffering in the aftermaths of the 1967 riots and the beating of the cab driver, Mr. Smith. So we needed that inspiration from those outside to tell us that it was possible for change.

Q: Do you know whether or not that, what was it, the Liver Clinic that Sammie David, Jr. sponsored, did it ever?

James: It worked. Him and Dr. Levy of the UMDNJ, and I remember his concert, the last one, I was telling somebody the other night. After he had the last show here at Symphony Hall, everyone had gone and I was out there just making sure that everybody was away, the doors were closed and locked. Here was Sammie walking down with a cane. The hip was bothering him. He

told me about his plastic hip, his one eye. And he could hardly walk. But I just was shocked back on that stage doing the dance, the tap dance, the dancing, the singing. Mr. Wonderful that's you. It proved a point that this great entertainer was energized when on the stage. The crowd make him endure the pain to participate, but he was ill, he was weak, he was in pain. And then, of course, as you indicated, he was doing it to raise money for that liver fondation that he and Dr. Levy of UMDNJ had founded for a great cause. And I grew even more appreciative of this very small individual. Sammie Davis close up was no matinee idol. Small, big head, all this, and one eye, the bad hip and everything else. He was never one, a handsome, but he had a heart of gold. One of the greatest entertainers that ever lived, starting as a youth. He was, he was a Michael Jackson talent back then. And James Brown and the one who would jump off the table and do that split. I'm trying to say Lonely Teardrop Man all in one.

Q: What do you remember about such public servants as the police, the fire fighters and social workers, etc.? And this is, I want you to refer to as far back as you can remember when you were younger.

James: They were, during those years, they were not ours. They were a foreign force in the City of Newark, part of the establishment to keep black folks in their place. They didn't hire blacks in large numbers. They had to go to court to get token representation on the fire department, token representation in the police department, and even today, the suits that we initiated back in the 70s are still current today in the fire department to make it representative. And to a degree, it was only a few years ago that we satisfied the courts in our police department on the question of diversity and ethnic representation of all the people. Now we do have a police force that's forty-six percent African-Americans and hispanics, latino. And our fire department, although behind that, we're moving it to a greater balance to show ethnic diversity. But when I grew up, they were a foreign force. They were almost like my days, I stated earlier in the south. They were not our friends. And we didn't have these jobs. They were above us. It was an army in place. It was the military. Now we've moved them to be Newark's finest, but also to look like Newark's finest, to look like the community and to be representative of the community. And, of course, to move the police

department to community policing, and the fire department to be more representative of the city.

Q: What about women on the police department? Are there any women there now?

James: Now, yes. Back then, no. But today, especially under the James administration, we've been able to recruit more and more women, African-Americans and latinos. And now we have women who've made captain and sargeant and Miss George following the footsteps of G. G. Fouchet who I have named as the first ABC secretary, who went up to be the first female warden. Her, part of her family. George is a seargent and captain. And other women, latinos and hispanics have made it. So now, we don't talk about sexism in the police department or the fire department. Talk about get the best candidate available, train them, and they take an oath of office to serve. And we are proud. We have women now in the horse pack, women on a motorcycle, women doing everything. So we're proud. We've come a long ways in terms of women serving in government, and specifically serving in our police department. We need more in the fire department, but always debate can they carry this sixty pound bag up a flight of stairs. And I think that's been thrown out of testing procedure, but there's still that idea. Can a female climb the ladder three stories and bring a hundred and eighty pound person down. And it's always been a question, quote, unquote that should be addressed.

Q: So do we have any women in the fire department?

James: I think we have about one or two or three. A few.

Q: I see.

James: Less. Certainly less than the police department.

Q: When you or others in your neighborhood got in trouble or needed help to solve a problem, to whom in Newark did you turn? Why and how effective were they in helping you?

James: I think there's always start with the family, with them, and then if the family could not solve those issues, you would turn to the church. The church has been always been a pillar of strength. Always there for guidance and leadership. So it was internally with the family, and if not the family, the church. We never thought today, as I hear people come to City Hall for everything. As I walk out here, people say I need a job, I need housing, I need this, I need that. When I was growing up, we never thought of going to City Hall asking for anything. We asked family and friends and then the church. And that was our salvation there. But we didn't believe government. I think that's why today we have a disproportionate dependency upon welfare. That's why today programs like Section 8, while good in essence, have harmed our community. People call me and say I want some TRA, temporary relocation assistance, where I don't pay rent for a year. It's just mind boggling that people today ask for things like there's an expectation, you owe me something. Give me something for nothing. And I think that attitude has not helped the African-American community. And that's why I say, strangely under slavery, we were able to advance perhaps at a greater rate than as opposed to freedom. Free to do what with.

Q: Those resources that you had to call on during those times were they effective in helping to solve whatever problems you had?

James: Family, friends and church, we did the best we could. We watched. Because our expectation was lower. We lived in that one room on Huyler Street. We washed in that one tub. We hung our clothes out. We ate potato chips and baked beans and hot dogs for dinner. We were not looking for the sun and the moon. We were looking to survive. And the way out of that was, if you survive, if you stay in school, if you get an education, the light is at the end of the tunnel. So we were about survival. Our spiritual survival. An extended family survival. Between extended family survival and our spiritual survival, and the importance of education, you could advance. You could improve the quality of life. And it has worked. And I think those two things. The family, the extended family, and a spiritual awareness is so powerful that if we could get more and more young people back into those to springboard the individual we will have a better community today. The family's breaking up today. The single family today. The feminization of



the race. The African-American female head of the household with a significant number of children. The absence of being able to keep a large number of young people in church. Pants down, skirts up, fruit of the loom showing, backside out, hair uncombed, foul body odor. That has replaced self-esteem. That has replaced the family today. And it is wrong. We must stand up and say it is wrong.

Q: In those early days, how was black Newark perceived? Was the community seen as a slum?

James: Well, I think the Central Ward was all we had. The Third Ward. And we were struggling then. We were mostly tenants. If you look at the City of Newark, the planners built most of the public housing in the Third Ward where we were. Columbus Homes and Stella Wright, and Archbishop Walsh, and you name them all. So this high rise living it was a tenant living, high rise, a room here, a flat there. And then eventually as we were able to survive and to endure and get an education and get a better job, we looked to the Wickwake Section. Well, first came Clinton Hill. We looked to Clinton Hill with Mrs. Mary Birch there and Roscoe Jennings. And then after Clinton Hill, we looked to the Wickwake Section. And then after Clinton Hill and the Wickwake Section, we looked to the Vailsburg Section. And then after Clinton Hill, South Ward, Wickwake Section, Vailsburg, we looked to North Ward, Forest Hill where they want to live today. And we have seldom been in the Iron Bound. Iron Bound our living has almost been quote, unquote similar to our early beginning. Housing and public housing. Hawkins Court, Roosevelt. But not really to establish an identity in the Iron Bound. The East Ward above Vreelinhisen Avenue where Emmett Street I lived, but not a real identity in terms of a neighborhood in the Iron Bound Section.

Q: How do you think the whites in Newark perceived the black neighborhoods or the black communities at that time?

James: I think it goes with the old civil rights statement. In the south, they didn't care how close you get. They didn't want you to get too big and uppity. So in the south, when I married a southern belle, Mary, and went south. I was shocked to learn that she lived across the street from

whites. Whites lived all around her. And they'd visit each other, and they went in each other's house. And she took me there. Now, Mary, you married that Yankee. I was shocked and frightened that they lived that close. But you could live close, couldn't get big, couldn't get uppity. In the north it's been the reverse. They didn't care how much money you made, care how big, didn't want to live with you. So it was strictly neighborhood segregation. And you know, Imperiali on Bloomfield Avenue beat with a stick, chased me home, you don't belong home. Chasing us home when I was with Southside, and we went in to play Barringer. They would chase us home. We went in to play Wickwake, the cops would chase us out of the Jewish community. We went into Vailsburg, they, the cops would chase us out. So it was strictly segregated. Your neighborhood, our neighborhood and the two shall never cross. We've changed that now. We don't have the Imperialis saying this is your place. Or the Imperialis saying Dr. Martin Luther Coon. It's an integrated city now. It's the all-American city.

Still the Iron Bound is trying to hold forth, but overtly you can live anywhere. There's no overt discrimination any more.

Q: Did all classes of African-Americans live close to you in your neighborhood? And if so, how did they get along with each other?

James: Always the same. As I moved from Emmett Street to 188 Venner Avenue to Wilbur, I've had few addresses other than Howard Street when we were really poor. What we find is that in the African-American neighborhoods homeowners and tenants always in it together because where as you buy it, the person who leaving will rent. With an option to buy to so they say. Or they put Section 8 people in. They don't care as long as they rent. So you never end up with a homogenous community of African-Americans because of that factor that, yes, I bought my house. But this guy is renting to someone. And then this guy wants the Section 8 people in it. So we have always had a, wherever you see African-Americans, it tends to be a mixed community. It can be predominantly homeowners. It can be predominantly tenants. But it will always be mixed because they are landlords and owners who are unscrupulous and have only one intent to collect money from African-Americans via rent or by hook or crook.

Q: Other than white store owners and other whites with a vested economic interest, do you recall any other whites having an interest in the black community?

James: Oh yes. Sidney Grayson. Helped so many. Daughter now, Betty Grayson. The church, the Jewish community, in fact I can't think of the rabbi. Rabbi, was it Skinner, who. No, Skinner who bought that church. Tenth Street and Lyons. Tenth and Clinton Avenue. Rabbi, the Jewish community. They knew they were leaving. But they tried to make it a smooth passage. I think the whites that showed an interest are realtors. None stood better than Sidney Grayson who was a good friend of Connie Mars Woodruff. Still I cherish the picture I have with Sidney Grayson, Connie Mars. Woodruff, Macy Belachu, we helped put in business. And then the Jewish religious community, knowing they were going to leave to go to Livingston, knowing they were going to leave to go to Short Hills, knowing they were going to leave to Milburn, they tried to smooth that transaction by trying to assist African-American churches come in and purchase their facilities. And even in terms of loan and business opportunities. So to that degree, the Jewish community, the real estate, and maybe it was profit motivation for the realtors. But at least there was communication and assistance on trying to have this merger of an exodus of predominantly whites and an influx of blacks.

Q: What incidents involving racial discrimination in Newark have you experienced?

James: The riots of 1967. Red Lion by the backs. And, of course, the Imperial stay out of our neighborhood or I'll shoot you or beat you. Even when the nuns were attacked by Vailsburg High School, disgrace to our city.

Q: What do you remember about the Mayor Springfield Avenue and who was that?

James: The Mayor of Springfield Avenue. Nata Rantono?

Q: I don't really know who it was.

James: I know that title. I know we're saying Mayor of Springfield Avenue. I'm not sure of that.

Q: What do you remember regarding such local personalities as William Ashby, Meyer Ellingstein, and Prosper Brewer?

James: Well, I will talk about Ashby who lived in South Ward. Who fought to integrate Pescis Avenue School where his son attended. Who fought to become the first president of that. Who fought to become our, in the school board fight with Parker and Ashby. He was a great fighter. Ashby, we should never forget for his courageous fight to improve the quality of education in the City of Newark. He was an outspoken leader at a time when it was not proper to be outspoken, and we should never forget Ashby.

Q: What about Meyer Ellingstein, Newark's first Jewish mayor? Do you remember him?

James: No. I think they operated mostly under the commission form of government so their impact is not as great as when in 1954 the charter changed and you had a Carlin, Leo P. Carlin, Adenizio and Gibson serving as the first under the 1954 for change in government. We have a strong mayor, a weak council.

Q: What about Irving Turner? I think you mentioned him before.

James: Great. Great. Our Jackie Robinson, our hero. He was the wind beneath our wings. First getting elected and fighting against the odds and fighting a great valiant battle. The only thing is we didn't know how to retire him and move him from the battlefield.

Q: What do you remember regarding black institutions, like hospitals, hotels and banks?

James: The only thing I remember was the Coleman Hotel on High Street. Was a symbol of African-American achievement and how tragic that decades later we have no African-American

hotel.

Q: What about banks? We mentioned earlier one black bank. But I remember there was another one right at the corner at the intersection of Springfield Avenue and Irving Turner Blvd.

James: I don't remember. The first one I remember is City National Bank. So I guess I didn't have any banking or money to do. Mine was still at Howard's with graham crackers and milk as kid, where that's how they got you to Howard Savings Bank. As a kid, we gave a dollar contribution, well a quarter, if they gave a dollar they thought you were a millionaire, and had the graham crackers and milk. So I was affiliated with Howard until I became an adult.

Q: How were you served, how important were they to the black community? The black institutions that we're talking about, how important were they to the black community, and how were you served by such institutions?

James: Well, speaking for City National Bank. Having an African-American bank brought a breath of fresh air. Because certainly they're not about red-lining, they're about providing loans for those who qualify without any racial discrimination. And I applaud and salute them.

Q: What do you recall regarding the kinds of music that one heard in black Newark?

James: Music was everywhere. You want to go to the Key Club, you want to go to SparkyJ, you want to the Button Room, you want to go to the Living Room, you want to go to Basin Street East at the corner of East Kenney and Broad Street where ten dancing girls came out. Newark was the spot to be. All roads lead to Newark. And we were a jumping city.

Q: In what leisure time activities did you participate or did you engage? What materials, etc., do you have from any of your community? We talked a lot about politics and civic involvement, and all that kind of stuff. And the final question on all of those is you do have any mementos, such as



pictures or documentation of your participation or what those organizations were and who was involved?

James: Oh I'm sure there are some pictures of all. You know, you get in the old scrapbook and radically there are pictures falling out of drawers and things like that. You always pick up one and see. But I've also been a participating athlete, you know, in tennis and skiing, soccer and swimming. And I know, you know, my headquarters those were on the walls.

Q: What can you tell us about the Newark Eagles?

James: Oh, that's the great. I played on the Newark Eagles. Everybody thought I was going to be a professional baseball player. Everyone talk about the Newark Bears, the white franchise, unknown to them the Newark Eagles was the best black team in America. In 1946, the World Series was held here in Newark, and the most valuable player was Monty Irving of Orange, Joe Louis threw out the first ball, played before a capacity crowd at Rupert Stadium. So in Newark, we had the best black team in baseball, the Newark Eagles, and we had one of the best white teams, Newark Bears. How great that 1996 we try to put one team up, black and white.

Q: Were there other black athletic or sports events that you attended?

James: I saw the Dodgers when they came, had Jackie Robinson in 1947 playing in Jersey City and coming to Newark. Jackie Robinson debuted in Newark in Rupert Stadium as well. And so I used to go there and watch him and Campanella play. It was exciting to see Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella coming to Rupert Stadium in Newark, New Jersey, and play baseball. They play in Roosevelt Stadium in Jersey City and then Rupert Stadium in Newark. And everybody would go. That was black night at the baseball. He was our hero, they were.

Q: What do you recall regarding the seamy side of Newark life?

James: Well, I remember the burlesque house on, the Minskys on Washington Street, where people used to tell me. I never went in there. I missed it. But they said the burlesque was so great and so good, people used to fall out the balcony trying to reach and touch those ladies on stage. But, and I meet people today who talk about, you remember where the Minskys were on Washington, where we have that municipal parking lot now. Newark had it all. They had after hour club, under cub. And I remember going to some on Central Avenue. When the bars were closed down, Newark had them after hour clubs. And we would dance and party. I mean, I was a younger person so I would go back there and watch and dance and act a little crazy too.

Q: What if any positive contributions did they make to the life of the community and how were they perceived by the Newark community?

James: They gave the city a personality. They kept those dollars turning around here. And I think they created an economic. Those clubs, all of them, meant dollars were going to be spent in Newark. And that's the hardest to have in urban city. Can you keep that dollar to turn over in your own community. But during them days everybody was spending, everybody was partying, everybody was having fun, and that meant that the economy was stimulated.

Q: What do you recall regarding public education in Newark? How well academically did black students seem to perform and how were they treated by white teachers and white students. And this is a long question. Were black students involved in intramural sports and/or extracurricular activities, and what black teachers do you recall.

James: None. None. I can't think, when I think back, I can't think of any. Number one, you were treated as a student. You were smacked like everybody else. I was beaten, slapped, kicked by teachers. And they expected you to do the work. And then after you got kicked, spanked, slapped by the teacher, your parents did, your neighbors did it, and, you know, you stayed in. I remember Miss Whipple smacking me. Caviar slapping me at Southside. They were rough on you, but we learned. And when you look at that ninety-six percent of Wickwake was going on to

colleges, whatever blacks were there. They expected you to learn. So you were treated harshly like all other students. You either made it or you didn't make it. There were no King Scholars. No charity. You were treated just like anybody else. But you were, students then were students. You were beaten, slapped and everything else. And we made it under those conditions.

Q: What would you consider to be the five most important events or developments that have occurred in Newark during your residence here? For example, like strikes, elections, riot, fire, natural disaster, black immigration. And why would you consider these things to be important.

James: Five, say it again, five.

Q: If you can name quickly five things that you think were outstanding events or developments in Newark.

James: Number one would be black political empowerment. Black political empowerment. The emergence of black leadership. Black political power, other communities still don't have black leadership. Economic development. Creating jobs. I think blacks in Newark make more money, supposed to be the third best community for blacks to live in terms of income. I got to get that in. You're gonna read about that. So emergence political power. Black political leadership. An economic thing created jobs for black people. The institutions of higher learning in Newark with Rutgers and Essex and UMDNJ, all the doctors around here. We got more blacks there than any other color. So, okay. And then I think the church. The strenght of the religious community in Newark, a new metropolitan, a new Bethany, they didn't leave. A new hope and a new Emanuel. The strenght of our religious community has continued to be a pillar of strenght. So we have spiritual leadership, political power, political African-American leadership, economic viability of the city creating jobs, and the institutions of higher learning. Education is possible. You can go to junior college now. You can go right here to Newark, right down to the college. And then the church.

Q: In what major ways has Newark changed since you first arrived here and how do you view that change that has taken place?

James: Exodus of white people. Exodus of major businesses. And that we now who now become who once was majority of people are now a majority of people and majority and power and control must find creative ways to deal with the exodus of economic projects and things in the City of Newark that also took job loss. So we have, then we have a population loss. So we got to bring people back to our city and create jobs and economic thing That's what left. When it turns black, the money left, the people left. Now we're here. We gotta bring dollars back and we gotta bring housing back, and we gotta bring people back, and we gotta make it work.

Q: I'm gonna ask you a couple more questions, and I'm gonna ask them all in one so that we can. I understand someone else is waiting for you.

James: Sure.

Q: When you feel black life in Newark reached its highest peak and what was so great about this particular time?

James: Haven't reached it yet. Since the riots of 1967, since the election of Ken Gibson in 1970, since the struggles he faced, and then passed the baton to me. I am now second generation black mayor. And they're trying to treat me as they treat Ken Gibson. We are still laying the foundation for this city to be one of the principal leaders for African-American leadership and achievement We haven't reached that yet. But we've made progress towards that and we're moving on. The whole idea of tearing down of all of the public housing and moving it with town houses and ownership is a step in the right direction. And we're going to continue. As we're improving upon our strip malls in our neighborhoods. So Newark had an old housing stock, we got to bring that down.

END SIDE ONE, TAPE THREE; BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE THREE

Q: What do you recall regarding Louise Scott? Did you know her or did you ever meet her? What was the community's perception of her? Did you ever visit her home on High Street.

James: I knew her great legacy of being at one time of the richest African-American women in our community. When she purchased the old Krueger-Scott Mansion, she was then considered one of the wealthiest women in New Jersey. Happened to be African-American. Then, of course, like all of our struggle she fell upon hard time, and then I knew the Scott who married Reverend Roundtree. I knew the Scott whose daughter used to come around her struggling to find some assistance, some aid in order to maintain the property, in order to renovate the property. I remember the tragedy of the city foreclosing on the property, taking it over. I remember the tragic circumstances under which she died, almost penniless and broke. And even some relatives going over there and trying to strip the Krueger Mansion, taking the ornaments off the wall. I should leave that nameless. So once again, it was that we do not know her, and around the corner from her Renee Stark. These women were high profile, highly successful when it was not, it was uncommon to be successful, uncommon to have that. Then as the city changed, they were caught in that change. With no support, no help. And we, the emerging black community, not in position to help or assist. And it's almost like the Irving Turner. We didn't know how to get people off the battlefield, didn't know how to retire people, we didn't know how to take care of our leaders.

Q: Did you ever visit the Scott Mansion when she was there?

James: Oh, even when she was there I met her just before she married my neighbor's son, the Roundtree, you know, Revreend Malachai Roundtree. I used to go out. Met them a couple of times I think when I got elected, she met me a couple times. Said, I need some help Sharpe James. I remember her saying to me, I need some help. What she was really saying, I did a lot for my people, and I still, and nobdy will help me. That's what she said to me. And I never forget as long as I live. She was saying look like the city owed me something. And with this transition



where we were in in black leadership, but the whites were still here. We still didn't have all the keys, still didn't have all the answers. We were unable to find a way to help her. So her glory days would be the end as well. And I think she's resting in heaven knowing what a great contribution she made. But the system failed her. She didn't fail the city, but the city failed her.

Q: What do you know about the High Street area where the Krueger-Scott Mansion is located? And what do you know about the occupants of the mansion who preceded Louise Scott?

James: Well, I think her daughter was in it for a while. Didn't Roundtree stay in for a while. I don't know. I thought her family was there.

Q: No, before she moved in. Before.

James: Oh you mean the whole Krueger people?

Q: Yeah, who, do you know who lived there? Who occupied the house before Mrs. Scott?

James: I thought the Krueger family had turned it into some. There was another family I thought. Cause they, the day we took it over, the city, the day Miss Hooker and others. They invited, I think, a white family down from the suburbs who might have had it in between the Kruegers. Not clear on that history. What I think was once the original Krueger family left, another family purchased the family, and they used it for an interim period before Mrs. Scott made the purchase. And then, of course, the city foreclosure. But they came and talked about their children being. They were there the day Miss Hooker, we announced this renovation, rehab program. And Edna Thomas who just passed was standing there that day.

Q: Edna Thomas is deceased.

James: Yesh. They just told me yesterday.

Q: How would you sum up your experience of living in Newark? If you had your life to live over, would you live in Newark and tell me why?

James: They asked Dr. King that question that if he could choose the time he was born, what time he would choose. Ecclesiastical time, the Crusade time. He said, it's God's call. God willing, I would choose the same time. If I had a choice, I would still be born under the same circumstances, same time and era, still be in Newark, and still love Newark. Newark has always been a fond treasure for me whether I'm walking on Emmett Street with my little sneakers on, my lemon lime pants. Up on Howard Street in one room taking a bath in tub, heating water, buying coal, going to the outhouse, going to Robert Treeter School, going to Miller Street, crying because they didn't select me for the Honor Roll, selected whites over me. Going up the hill to Southside High School. Newark has given me everything, and the only thing I want to do is give something back to the city that took this poor boy who was a transient from the south, gave him hope, gave him love, kept him alive, gave him an education. And now I'm in the unique position to give something back to the community. So I would do it all over again. And the only thing is to make sure that at the end that I'll be able to give something back to the city.

Q: Mr. James, now is there anything that we did not cover that you would like to tell us about? Sharpe James, the man or what inspired you to or inspired and influenced you to become what or who you are today.

James: I think it's been the whole community working on me. It's been. Remember I was selected by the electorate. And I am part of the good and bad of Newark. The glory days, transitional days, the change days, the challenge days. And it's been an exciting adventure involving our people. I just hope that when it's all over that someone will be able to say that here lies Sharpe James. He tried to make a difference. Perhaps in the words of Dr. King, he tried to love somebody, he tried to help somebody, he tried to make a difference. That's what it's been about. I could move out tomorrow. I had the dollars and cents to do that. Find a better community, find a better neighborhood, drive a better car. But then I wouldn't be the Sharpe that I know. The

Sharpe that truthfully loved the city because I've seen it during the good days, I've seen our down days, I've seen change. Now I want to make sure I go out trying to bring back some of that, the glory days that assisted me. So it's a, I'm living a life of challenge, fun and spirituality here in the city that I love. I want to see how many other Sharpe Jameses I can maybe reach out and touch that will carry the baton.

Q: Finally, what are your aspirations for your future and what do you see as the future for the City of Newark?

James: I see a bright future for Newark despite all of the negativism. Because it all stems from a philosophical belief by those at the Ledger that they should destroy our city. That African-Americans are not respected. We have racism in America which is fundamental as mother and apple pie. It is no wonder they concentrate on our African-American leadership. It is no wonder they concentrate on knocking our African-American administration. A town to south and north to us, named Newark. Focus on Newark, focus on the negative. Is the glass empty or half full. Comes to an African-American it's always half empty. My conclusion would be to finish this term and then to answer that question that everyone's waiting for, will I seek another term. But more important, the end of my political career will be to go fishing, to assist my children that they continue to contribute something to life. And to take care of some grandchildren that hopefully will be on the way soon. And to just go fishing and to write. I will be writing. I am a prolific writer, and I've started a book, maybe ten years ago, stop and start, stop and start. But I did start, and there are so many chapters written that I need to find an author who can sit with me and put it together. I write in streaks. I wake up four o'clock and write ten or twenty pages. Then I'll go without writing for maybe six months or a year. Then I'll sit and write four, five, six chapters. I have so many chapters and so many incidents that I put to words about my Newark experience. That one day I want to put it in writing so others might read it, review it, learn from our mistakes of the past, or learn from some of the things we did well. But at least there would be a legacy that others could review and evaluate.

Q: Well, Mr. Mayor, I want to thank you so very much for this, these two sessions. It has been a tremendous enlightenment for me in terms of not only you as a person, but also the City of Newark. And I hear coming from you a hope for our people.

James: We're gonna prove that the doomsayers are wrong, and that's gonna be out great legacy. That we can endure. You know what they say like Joseph in the Bible, what happened if you slay the dreamer. You know, we found that with Dr. King. You can slay the dreamer, but his dreams continue to stay alive and live on. So we're gonna continue to struggle, make this city. They gave it to us in bad condition. They gave it to us after they raped this city physically, morally. And then they said for us to work a miracle. And we're often being measured against a miracle. A guy said, well, Sharpe James wasn't selected in these twenty-five mayors. I was wondering. No one was selected from New Jersey. But I am the president of all the mayors in America. I am the vice president of New Jersey League I am the trustee for the League of Municipalities. So I have fifty titles. But they didn't mention anyone, but you're faulting me because this magazine which means nothing because they selected first-term mayors. Brown of San Francisco with his two thousand suits on, learning the job of San Francisco. Whose famous calling the quarterback crazy of the San Francisco 49ers. And Giuliani with his gimmicks with Matthew my son, and I got rid of squeezy man He's learning on the job. We've been in this a long time. And privatization. I gave Mayor Randall came and visit and call. You'll never read about those things So we have to endure against the odds, climb the rough side of the mountain. But in the end there will be a new Newark when it's all over.

Q: Well, again thank you, Mr. Mayor, and I certainly hope you.

James: Happy holidays.

Q: The same to you. And I hope you every success. You've made it so far, and don't let those people beat you down.

END OF INTERVIEW